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NO 62

V

STRONGPOINT



Through the pounding flak of the savage enemy sky,
and then . . .

BOMBS GONE !



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THREE Issues Every Month !

STRONGPOINT

CASSINO, ITALY 1944. ABOVE THAT TERRIBLE BATTLEFIELD LOOMED MONASTERY HILL. RIDDLED WITH GERMAN OBSERVATION POSTS, MACHINE-GUN EMPLACEMENTS AND MORTAR CONCENTRATIONS, IT BROODED MENACINGLY OVER THE MEN WHO CROUCHED ON THOSE BULLET-SWEPT SLOPES, ATTEMPTING THE BREAK-THROUGH THAT WOULD LEAD THE ALLIES INTO ROME. BUT OUR STORY IS OF MEN NOT OF MOUNTAINS ...



Chapter 1

FIRST ACTION

BEFORE THE ALLIED ADVANCE REACHED CASSINO, THERE HAD BEEN OTHER MOUNTAIN BARRIERS TO BE BREACHED AND MANY FIERCELY DEFENDED RIVERS TO BE CROSSED -- RIVERS LIKE THE NIBRO ...



THROUGH A MURDEROUS HAIL OF BULLETS THE INFANTRY ASSAULT BOATS OF THE NORTH WOLDS REGIMENT CLAWED ACROSS THE WATER ...

PUT SOME BEEF INTO IT, YOU LAYABOUTS ... WE'RE NOT ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON EXCURSION.



THE LEADING ASSAULT TROOPS HIT THE BANK AND STORMED ASHORE ...

OVER THE TOP, LADS!



THE BRITISH SOLDIERS FLUNG THEMSELVES FORWARD ...
**ON TO GROUND
SOWN WITH
HIDDEN DEATH!**



Strongpoint

AND EVEN AS THAT GALLANT ATTACK WAS BLUNTED, ROYAL ENGINEERS WERE STRIVING TO PUSH A BRIDGE ACROSS THE RIVER SO THAT REINFORCEMENTS COULD POUR OVER.



DARTING FROM THE COVER OF THE TREES, A RUNNER BROUGHT A VERBAL MESSAGE TO THE HARASSED ENGINEER LIEUTENANT IN CHARGE.

MAJOR WESTON'S COMPLIMENTS, SIR! WILL YOU DETAIL AN 'N.C.O. AND ONE MAN TO CROSS THE RIVER. THE ENEMY HAVE RE-LAID THE MINEFIELD YOU CLEARED LAST NIGHT.



OH, HECK~~ HOW CAN I SPARE TWO MEN NOW? ALL RIGHT, EVANS... WILL DO!

THE LIEUTENANT TURNED AND LOOKED OVER THE SQUAD OF SWEATING, TOILING MEN. HE LET OUT A HAIL AND LANCE CORPORAL TUG WILSON'S HEART BEAT FASTER AS HE HEARD HIS NAME CALLED ...

SORRY TO GIVE YOU A STICKY JOB ON YOUR FIRST 'DO' WITH US, CORPORAL, BUT I CAN SPARE NO ONE ELSE. JERRY'S RE-LAID THE MINEFIELD ON THE FAR BANK. THE C.O. WANTS YOU TO CROSS OVER AND CLEAR A NARROW PATH WHILE A FULL CLEARANCE SQUAD IS BEING ORGANISED.

VERY GOOD, SIR!



THE BLOOD POUNDED IN TUG WILSON'S HEAD -- THIS WAS IT! WOULD HE MAKE A HASH OF THIS, HIS FIRST JOB IN ACTION?

I'LL SEND SAPPER BARKER WITH YOU -- HE'S A STEADY, EXPERIENCED CHAP.

THANK YOU, SIR!

TAKE IT GENTLY, CORPORAL ... AND GOOD LUCK!



THE OFFICER LOOKED AFTER LANCE CORPORAL TUG WILSON AND SAPPER JACK BARKER THOUGHTFULLY ...

YES, A STICKY JOB FOR A CHAP TO GET BLOODED, ON BUT WILSON SEEMS A PRETTY RELIABLE TYPE. WE SHALL SEE!

I'LL NIP OVER TO THE SUPPLY TRUCK AND GET A ROLL OF TAPE, CORP!

... AND BRING A COUPLE OF BAYONETS, WILL YOU, WHILE I LAY ON A BOAT FOR US.



Strongpoint

A PLACE WAS QUICKLY FOUND FOR THE ENGINEERS IN ONE OF THE ASSAULT BOATS AND THEY PUSHED OFF IN THE FACE OF AN ENEMY FIRE THAT HAD SCARCELY SLACKENED.



THEY MADE THE PERILOUS CROSSING UNSCATHED--BUT THE YOUNG ENGINEER CORPORAL KNEW HIS REAL TESTING TIME LAY AHEAD.



AS TUG INCHED FORWARD CAUTIOUSLY, HE PRODDED AT THE RAIN-SOFTENED GROUND WITH HIS BAYONET. WOULD HE HEAR THE CLANK OF STEEL ON A MINE CASING AMIDST THE CLATTER OF THE BRENS AND THE CRUMP OF MORTAR BOMBS. ?



THE BAYONET SHUDDERED AS IT HIT SOMETHING. WAS IT A MINE OR JUST A STONE ? CAREFULLY, METHODICALLY, TUG DUG ROUND THE OBJECT WHILE ALL ABOUT WAS THE VICIOUS WHISPER OF FLYING BULLETS.



BUT NOW NO DIN OF BATTLE COULD DISTURB THE LANCE CORPORAL'S INTENSE CONCENTRATION AS HE GENTLY EASED THE MINE FROM ITS HOLE.



Strongpoint

HIS STEADY FINGERS
DEFTLY REMOVED
THE IGNITER: ...



THERE WAS A GLINT OF RESPECT IN
SAPPER BARKER'S EYES AS HE PAID
OUT THE TAPE BEHIND THE N.C.O. WHO
WAS ALREADY MOVING ON ... THIS NEW
LAD WAS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT.



IN THE NEXT THIRTY YARDS, FIVE MORE MINES WERE UNEARTHED
AND RENDERED HARMLESS. AHEAD THE WAY WAS SAFE ...



THE NORTH WOLDS BEGAN TO STREAM
PAST THE TWO SAPPERS AND THEN THE
GERMAN ARTILLERY RANGED ON THE
GAP IN THEIR MINEFIELD.



Strongpoint

SHELL AFTER SHELL CRASHED ABOUT THE TWO MEN AS THEY HUGGED THE EARTH. SOMEHOW THEY SURVIVED BUT THE PATH WAS HIT REPEATEDLY ...

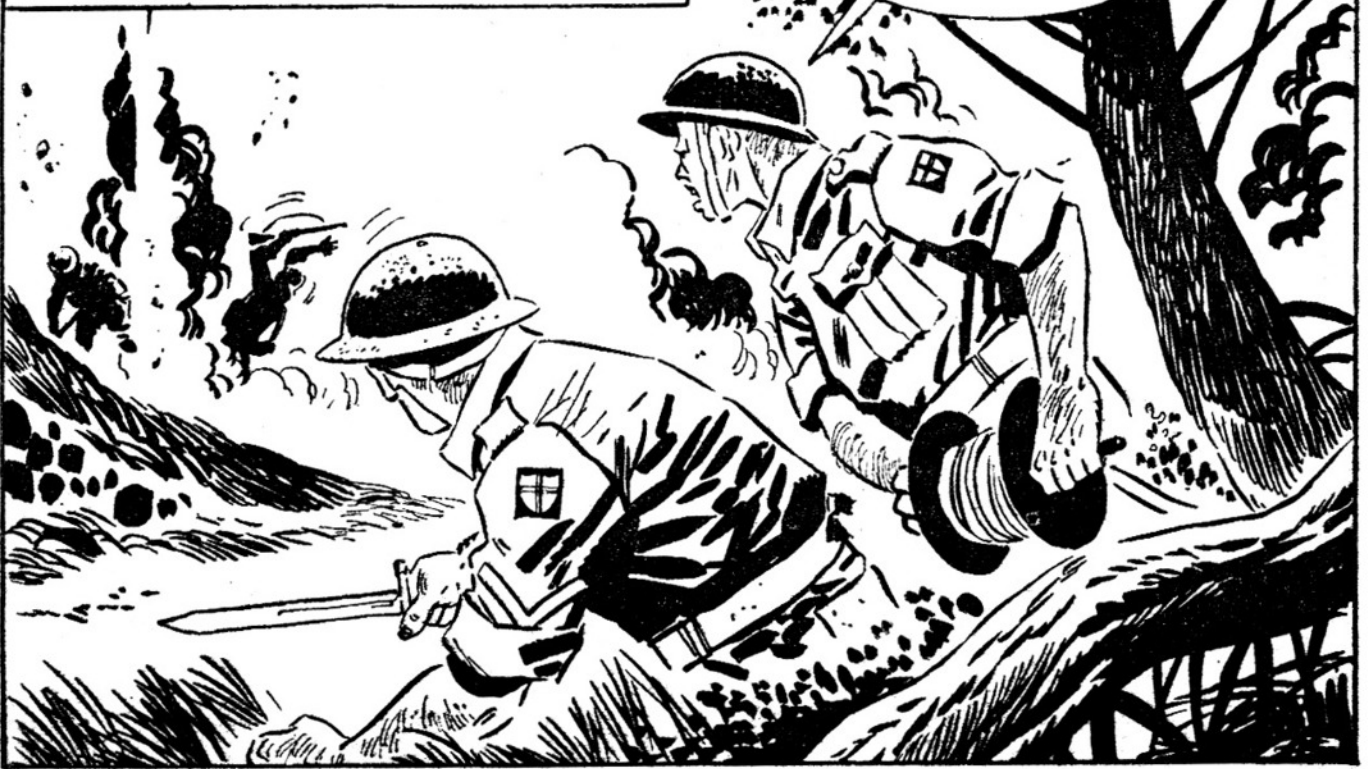


FOR A MOMENT THE BARRAGE SLACKENED, AND A FRESH PLATOON OF INFANTRY RACED FORWARD ...



LANCE CORPORAL TUG WILSON AND HIS FELLOW SAPPER HAD JUST STARTED THEIR SEARCH FOR MORE MINES WHEN IT HAPPENED ...

GOOD GRIEF!
THOSE ARE MINES
EXPLODING ...



THE BOTTOM SEEMED TO DROP OUT OF TUG'S WORLD -- SURELY HE HAD NOT MISSED ANY MINES! WITH BELLOWS OF ALARM, THE SOLDIERS WERE BLUNDERING ON -- TWO MORE SCHUMINES WENT OFF. VIOLENTLY ...

AAAGH!

THERE'S MINES
ALL ROUND US --
THAT PATH LED
INTO THEM!



Strongpoint

CORPORAL BURKE, THE PLATOON LEADER, CROUCHED BY A STUNTED TREE, HIS FACE PALLID WITH FEAR OF THE INVISIBLE DEATH BENEATH THEIR FEET . . .

WE CAN'T STAY HERE, CORPORAL-- WE'LL HAVE TO CHANCE THE MINES!



SUDDENLY, TUG SNAPPED INTO LIFE AS HE SAW THE TINY GROUP OF SOLDIERS FROZEN INTO IMMOBILITY IN THE MIDST OF THAT SHAMBLES .

COME ON, WE'VE GOT TO GET 'EM OUT OF THERE!



IN THREE MINUTES THEY HAD ENSURED THAT THE WAY WAS CLEAR ...



TUG'S FACE FLUSHED ANGRILY AS THE BURLY CORPORAL MOVED MENACINGLY TOWARDS HIM. THE MAN'S FEAR HAD SUDDENLY CHANGED TO UNCONTROLLED RAGE ...



BURKE'S CLOSE-SET EYES SPARKED DANGEROUSLY AND HIS ARM SWUNG ROUND VICIOUSLY.

IN FACT--
I'LL SHUT IT
FOR YOU!

UGH!



SLOWLY, TUG'S SENSES RETURNED AND HE LOOKED DAZEDLY AFTER THE INFANTRYMEN AS THEY DISAPPEARED FROM VIEW.

W--WHAT
HAPPENED?

THAT BONE-HEADED
THUG CLOUTED YOU, CORP.
IF HE'D BEEN DOING *HIS*
JOB PROPERLY, HE'D HAVE
SEEN THAT A SHELL HAD
MOVED THE TAPES!



Chapter 2 NO-MAN'S LAND

THE RIVER NIBRO WAS CROSSED AND OTHER OBSTACLES NORTH OF IT, BUT ALWAYS ANOTHER DEFENCE BARRIER LOOMED AHEAD...



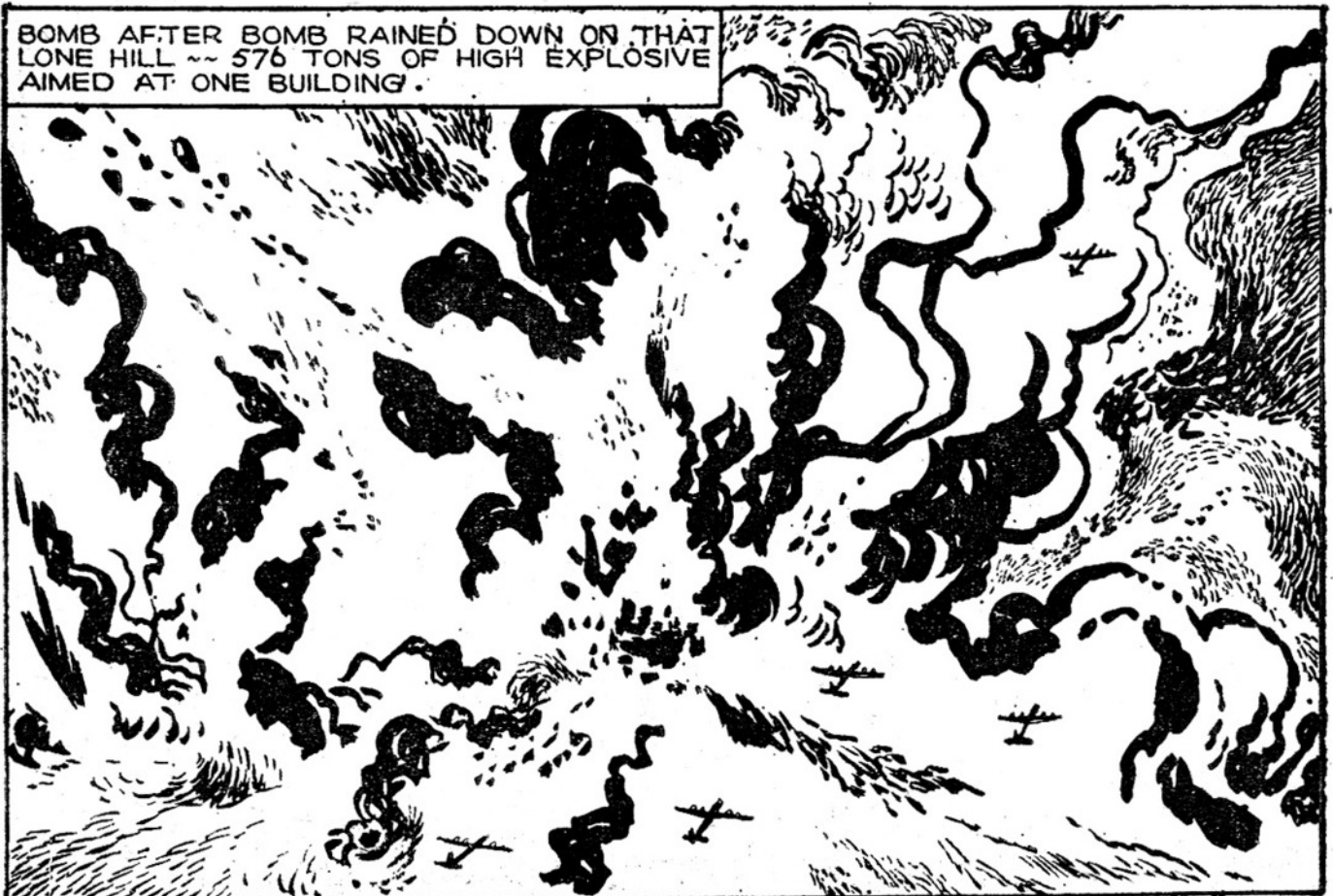
IN THREE MONTHS, TUG WILSON HAD BEEN READILY ACCEPTED INTO THE EASY CAMARADIE OF THE FRONT LINE SAPPERS FOR HE HAD PROVED HIMSELF ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE - THE TESTING GROUND OF ANY FIGHTING MAN.



BUT THE SAPPERS WERE NOT TO MEET UP WITH THE NORTH WOLDS UNTIL ONE OF THE MOST CONCENTRATED BOMBING OPERATIONS IN THE WAR HAD BEEN UNDERTAKEN -- THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF CASSINO MONASTERY.



BOMB AFTER BOMB RAINED DOWN ON THAT LONE HILL -- 576 TONS OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE AIMED AT ONE BUILDING.



22.45 WAS ZERO HOUR FOR THE NORTH WOLDS' ATTACK -- THREE HOURS AFTER THE FIRST TROOPS WENT INTO THAT INFERNO ...



IT SEEMED IMPOSSIBLE THAT ANYTHING COULD LIVE THROUGH SUCH A BOMBARDMENT, BUT WHEN THE ALLIES LAUNCHED THEIR ATTACK THE NEXT NIGHT, THEY WERE STILL MET WITH A WITHERING MACHINE-GUN FIRE FROM THE GERMAN POSITIONS.

THIRTY SECONDS TO GO, JACK ...

ALL I HOPE IS NO ONE PUTS A BULLET IN THIS PACK OF EXPLOSIVES ON MY BACK -- I WANT TO DIE IN ONE PIECE !



Strongpoint

IN COMMON WITH EVERY MAN THERE, TUG FELT HIS NERVES STRETCHED TO BREAKING POINT AS THE TENSION MOUNTED -- ONCE MORE HE MUST MEET DEATH FACE TO FACE. NEARBY, A WHISTLE SHRILLED ...



WILD EXCITEMENT DROVE THE TENSION OF THE WAITING AWAY AND TUG FOUND HIMSELF SCRAMBLING FORWARD WITH THE OTHERS, AN INCOHERENT SHOUT OF DEFIANCE ON HIS LIPS. BUT THEY ONLY COVERED FIFTY YARDS WITH THEIR RANKS THINNING WITH EVERY STRIDE ...



THE TWO ENGINEERS REACHED THE BARBED WIRE AND JACK BARKER THRUST TWO PACKETS OF EXPLOSIVES IN HIS CORPORAL'S HANDS.

HERE, TUG -- TWO CHARGES!

THEY'LL DO FINE -- NOW GET BACK INTO COVER, JACK, WHILE I FUSE 'EM!



THE FUSE WAS SHORT. TUG FELT THE HOT BLAST OF THE EXPLOSION AND DIRT AND PEBBLES STRUCK HIM PAINFULLY AS HE FLATTENED HIMSELF ON THE GROUND ONLY FOUR YARDS AWAY.



HE SAW AT ONCE THAT THE CHARGES HAD DONE THEIR WORK WELL. THE WIRE GAPPED OPEN...

COME ON, YOU MEN -- THE WIRE'S OPEN!



AGAIN HE YELLED, RISKING A BURST FROM AN ENEMY GUN -- **BUT NOT A MAN MOVED FROM OUT OF THE DARKNESS.**

WHAT'S HOLDING THEM UP? THEY CAN'T ALL BE DONE FOR!



A BRACE OF MORTAR BOMBS CRASHED CLOSE BY AND AN INVISIBLE SPANDAUS SENT A STREAM OF BULLETS RIPPING ABOVE HIS HEAD. TUG KNEW HE DARE NOT REMAIN A MOMENT LONGER...

IT'S NO GOOD! THEY'VE GOT ME PIN-POINTED...



SUDDENLY THE GROUND SEEMED TO DISAPPEAR FROM BENEATH HIS FEET AND HE PLUNGED INTO A CREVICE IN THE ROCK...

AAGH!



THE CORPORAL HAD A BLURRED GLIMPSE OF WHITE FACES AND STEEL HELMETS ~~ AND A FIERCE RAGE GRIPPED HIM.



WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU SKULKING HERE FOR? THE WAY WAS CLEAR ~~ WHY DIDN'T YOU RUSH THAT NEXT JERRY POSITION?

A FAMILIAR VOICE CAME FROM CLOSE BY~~ A VOICE AS BITTER AS TUG'S. SAPPER JACK BARKER PUSHED FORWARD ...



HERE'S WHY, TUG~~ THEIR SERGEANT ORDERED THEM TO STAY PUT! AND GUESS WHO HE IS, CHUM ...

NO! NOT HIM ...

Strongpoint

TUG'S EYES FLAMED -- THE BURLY SERGEANT WAS NONE OTHER THAN THE MAN WHO HAD KNOCKED HIM OUT DURING THE NIBRO CROSSING.



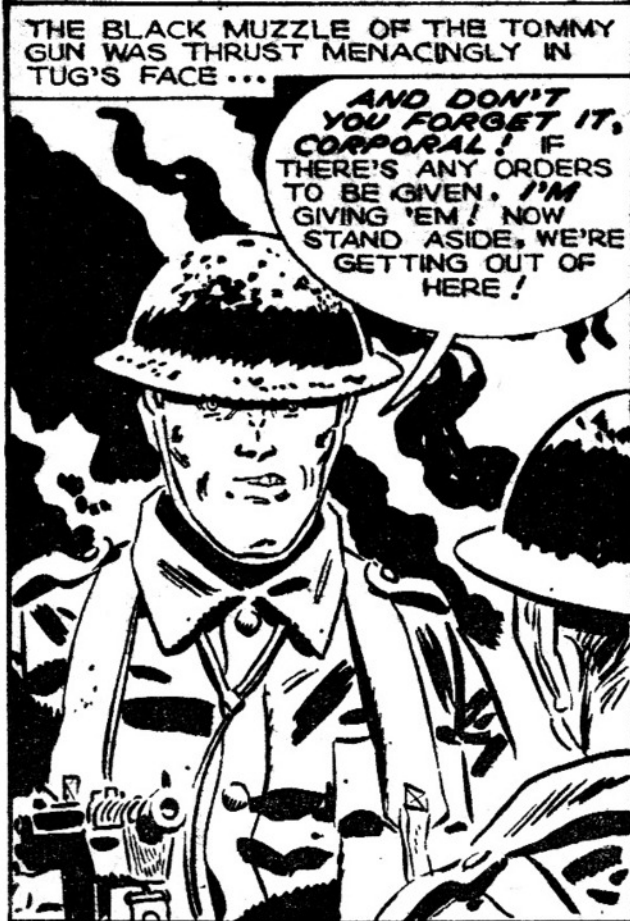
TUG WILSON SHOT A GLANCE AT THE SOLDIERS BEHIND BURKE -- THERE WAS NOTHING OF FEAR IN THEIR FACES, ONLY SULLEN REBELLION:



HANDS TIGHTENED ON RIFLES, AS THE SOLDIERS
ACCEPTED THAT STIRRING CHALLENGE -- AND
THEN CAME A HARSH INTERRUPTION!



THE BLACK MUZZLE OF THE TOMMY
GUN WAS THRUST MENACINGLY IN
TUG'S FACE...



FRUSTRATION AND ANGER BIT DEEP LIKE
ACID INTO THE CORPORAL'S FIGHTING SPIRIT
AS HE WATCHED BURKE ORGANISE THE
WITHDRAWAL.



THE BREN CLATTERED NOISILY AND THE BUNCH OF NORTH WOLDS SCRAMBLED OUT OF THE CREVICE. BUT THEY HAD SCARCELY MOVED TWO PACES WHEN THE ENEMY STRUCK AT THEM.



THE GERMAN FIRE WAS DEADLY...
MERCILESSLY CUTTING DOWN MAN
AFTER MAN.

YOU CRAZY
BLUNDERING FOOL~~
YOU'VE SENT THEM
TO THEIR DEATHS!



A LOW MOAN CAME FROM ONE OF
THE HUDDLED SHAPES CLOSE TO
THE LIP OF THE FISSURE AND A
SOLDIER GAVE AN EXCLAMATION.

THAT WAS RON~~
MY MATE, RON!
I'M GOING TO
GET HIM!

U-U-GH!
H-HARRY...



HANG ON,
CHUM~~ I'LL
COME WITH
YOU!

A FLARE FLICKERED OUT AND THE
GERMAN GUNS STUTTERED INTO
SILENCE FOR A MOMENT AS THE TWO
MEN EXAMINED THE STILL FIGURES ON
THE GROUND.

HE'S STILL
BREATHING,
CORPORAL...



LET'S GET HIM
BACK INTO COVER~~
HE'S THE ONLY ONE
ALIVE, I'M AFRAID.

A CLOSER EXAMINATION IN THE DIM
SAFETY OF THE SLIT IN THE GROUND
REVEALED NO WOUND.

I CAN'T FIND
WHERE HE'S
BEEN HIT...

PROBABLY FAINED
IF I KNOW WILLIAMS~~
HE SHOULD HAVE
JOINED THE A.T.S.!

YOU'D BETTER
CLOSE YOUR
MOUTH, BURKE~~
BEFORE I CLOSE
IT FOR YOU~~ BIG
AS YOU ARE!



THE THREAT IN TUG'S VOICE WAS
QUIET BUT DEADLY EARNEST.

SUDDENLY, TUG BENT CLOSER...

THERE'S A TEAR IN HIS BATTLE-DRESS ~~ LOOKS LIKE A BULLET-HOLE !



THE CORPORAL GENTLY FELT BENEATH THE RIP IN THE POCKET...

GREAT SCOTT! THIS COIN MUST HAVE STOPPED THE BULLET THAT HIT HIM! THE BLOW OVER THE HEART KNOCKED HIM OUT!



THE EYES OF THE SOLDIER, RON WILLIAMS, FLICKERED OPEN ~~ GLAZED AT FIRST, THEY LIT UP IN WONDER WHEN TUG SHOWED HIM THE COIN.

MY LUCKY COIN!

LUCKY! YOU'RE NOT KIDDING! IF THE COIN HADN'T STOPPED IT, THAT BULLET WOULD HAVE BEEN IN YOUR HEART.

THAT'S RIGHT ENOUGH, RON! BLOOMIN' MIRACULOUS, IT IS!





THAT'S NOT THE HALF OF IT, HARRY! MY OLD MAN GAVE ME THAT COIN -- D'YOU KNOW, IT SAVED HIS LIFE IN EXACTLY THE SAME WAY IN THE LAST WAR. HERE -- I'LL SHOW YOU ...



WILLIAMS HELD UP THE COIN FOR ALL TO SEE ...

SEE, THERE ARE TWO GASHES ON IT -- A NEW ONE MADE BY THIS BULLET AND THE OTHER BY A BIT OF SHRAPNEL IN NINETEEN-SEVENTEEN. BY GUM, THAT'S A LUCKY COIN ALL RIGHT!



THERE WAS A MURMUR OF AWE FROM THE OTHERS -- BROKEN ABRUPTLY BY A RAUCOUS SNORT FROM THE LOUTISH SERGEANT.

AH! PHOOEY! YOUR OLD MAN MUST HAVE BEEN DRUNK WHEN HE RECKONS THAT HAPPENED! ANYWAY, YOU'LL NEED MORE THAN A LUCKY COIN TO GET YOU OUT OF THIS MESS WITH A WHOLE SKIN!

OCCASIONAL STREAMS OF TRACER STILL CRISS-CROSSED THE SKY BUT THE BULK OF THE FIRING HAD CEASED. THE ALLIED ATTACK HAD BEEN BEATEN OFF AND **THE SIX MEN WERE MAROONED IN NO-MAN'S LAND!**

HEY, TUG ~ THIS GULLY LEADS ON TO A NARROW LEDGE WHICH RUNS ALONG THE SIDE OF THE CLIFF ON OUR RIGHT. IT **MIGHT** BE A WAY OUT.

JERRY WILL WINKLE US OUT OF HERE FOR SURE IF WE STAY. LET'S SEE BURKE ~ HE'S TRYING TO CONTACT HIS H.Q. ON THE WIRELESS.



THERE HAD BEEN NO ANSWER TO BURKE'S CALLS ON THE WIRELESS AND HE FLUNG DOWN THE MICROPHONE IN DISGUST.

FLAMIN' H.Q. ~ THEY WON'T ANSWER! WRITTEN US OFF, I SUPPOSE.

LOOK, BURKE, MY BLOKE'S FOUND A LEDGE WHICH MIGHT GIVE US A WAY OUT OF THIS HOLE. JERRY'S ALREADY TRYING TO PIN-POINT US WITH HIS MORTARS.



BURKE SNEERED DERISIVELY ...

LEDGE ~ WAY
OUT! WHAT D'YOU
THINK WE ARE ~
MOUNTAIN GOATS?
MORE LIKELY TO
BREAK OUR
PERISHIN' NECKS!

JERRY'LL BE DROPPING
MORTARS **ON** OUR NECKS
ANY TIME NOW ~ THEY'RE
RANGING CLOSER. THERE'S
A CHANCE THE LEDGE MAY
LEAD DOWN INTO THE
VALLEY WHERE OUR
FORWARD UNITS ...



TUG NEVER FINISHED HIS SENTENCE ~ THERE WAS A DEAFENING CRASH AND A BLINDING FLASH AS A MORTAR BOMB EXPLODED ONLY TWO YARDS AWAY ...

AAGH!



THE DARKNESS COULD NOT CONCEAL
THE TREMOR IN BURKE'S VOICE ...

A-ALL RIGHT!
W-WE'LL GET
MOVIN' ON YOUR
FEET! THE LOT
OFF YOU!



Chapter 3 **PATH OF PERIL**

AS JACK BARKER LED THE WAY ON TO THE NARROW LEDGE, TUG GLANCED AT HIS WATCH. THE TIME WAS 01.50 HOURS -- IT WAS A BARE THREE HOURS SINCE THE ATTACK HAD GONE IN -- THREE VIOLENT HOURS.



THE FOOTHOLD WAS MERE INCHES WIDE, CRUMBLING AND PRECARIOUS -- AND IT LED ONLY ONE WAY -- INTO ENEMY LINES!-



THE MURMUR OF GUTTURAL VOICES A FEW FEET ABOVE THEIR HEADS WARNED OF THE NEARNESS OF AN ENEMY POSITION. THEN TUG NOTICED THAT THE MAN IN FRONT OF HIM, WILLIAMS, WAS SWAYING DANGEROUSLY ...



THE DAZED MAN'S FOOT SLIPPED ...



THE SCUFFLE OF FEET AND THE CLATTER OF FALLING STONES REACHED THE ALERT EARS OF THE GERMANS IN THE MACHINE-GUN EMPLACEMENT ...



Strongpoint

TUG SCARCELY DARED TO BREATHE, BUT IT SEEMED THE GERMANS WERE SATISFIED, SO HE SET ABOUT SAVING WILLIAMS WHO WAS HANGING BY THE BLOUSE OF HIS BATTLE DRESS FROM A STOUT TWIG.



ALTHOUGH ANY MORE NOISE MIGHT BRING A BURST OF LEAD ON HIS UNDEFENDED BACK FROM THE GERMANS ABOVE, TUG WILSON BEGAN TO MAN-HANDLE THE OTHER MAN TO SAFETY.



IT WAS AN EXHAUSTING, MUSCLE-WRACKING STRUGGLE WHICH HAD TO BE CARRIED OUT IN UTTER SILENCE... BUT AT LAST IT WAS DONE.



TWENTY YARDS FARTHER ON, THE LEDGE WIDENED -- AND THERE, THE TWO MEN FOUND THE OTHERS ...



RON!
YOU'RE SAFE!
I THOUGHT ...

HE'S THE LUCKIEST
MAN I'VE EVER MET --
BY ALL THE RULES HE
SHOULD HAVE DIED
TWICE TONIGHT.

AND
I PROBABLY
WOULD HAVE
DONE IF YOU
HADN'T HELPED
ME, CORPORAL.

BURKE INTERRUPTED, HIS VOICE HARSH WITH SUPPRESSED FEAR.

I THOUGHT YOU
SAID THIS WOULD
LEAD US DOWN
INTO OUR LINES.
LOOK WHERE WE
ARE -- STUCK HERE
WITH JERRIES ALL
ROUND US. THAT'S
WHAT COMES OF
LISTENING TO A
NO-GOOD
PLUMBER!

IF WE'D STAYED BEHIND,
WE'D HAVE BEEN BLOWN TO
BITS, BURKE -- WE'LL HAVE
TO PRESS ON AND LOOK
FOR A PLACE TO HIDE UP.



ON THEY CREPT, TAKING HAIR-RAISING RISKS IN THE DARKNESS, YET ESCAPING DETECTION BY SHEER EFFRONTERY. FOR WAS THIS NOT THE ENEMY'S IMPREGNABLE DEFENCE LINE?



04.20 HOURS. THE RUMBLE OF HEAVY MOTORS AND THE OCCASIONAL GLIMPSE OF MOVING LIGHTS TOLD TUG THAT A ROAD WAS AHEAD -- PROBABLY THE ROAD CARRYING SUPPLIES TO THE TOWN OF CASSINO. SOON IT WOULD BE DAWN ...



JACK, WE'VE GOT TO GO TO GROUND -- IT'LL BE LIGHT IN LESS THAN AN HOUR. LET'S HAVE A LOOK AT THOSE ROCKS...

IN FORTY MINUTES OF BACK-BREAKING TOIL, THE MEN MANAGED TO CONSTRUCT A HIDING-PLACE AMONGST THE TUMBLING ROCKS -- ONE THAT WOULD ESCAPE DETECTION EXCEPT BY A CLOSE INSPECTION.



THE TWO ENGINEERS SLUMPED EXHAUSTEDLY BESIDE THE OTHER MEN ...

WELL, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO LIE UP HERE ALL DAY,

MAYBE WE OUGHT TO GIVE RON'S COIN A RUB FOR LUCK!



THAT'S SOME COIN YOU'VE GOT THERE, RON! I'M NOT SUPERSTITIOUS -- BUT IT CERTAINLY MAKES ME THINK. YOU'VE ESCAPED TWICE -- AND HOW WE GOT THROUGH THE JERRY LINES WITHOUT BEING SEEN, I'LL NEVER KNOW.

YEP, I RECKON I SHALL BE ALL RIGHT WHILE I'VE GOT THE COIN. IT'S ONLY A TEN-FRANC PIECE, BUT I WOULDN'T SELL IT FOR ANYTHING!



THEY BEGAN TO BREAK OPEN THEIR EMERGENCY RATIONS -- BUT BURKE'S SLOW, MOROSE MIND WAS THINKING OF OTHER THINGS THAN FOOD.



DURING THE LONG HOURS OF DAYLIGHT THE FIVE MEN RESTED UP, ONE ALWAYS KEEPING WATCH ...



THE HIDING-PLACE WAS CRAMPED, THEIR FOOD WOULD NOT LAST ANOTHER DAY AND TO TUG, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THEY MUST MOVE. THAT EVENING...

WELL, YOU CAN PLEASE YOURSELF, BURKE -- STAY HERE IF YOU LIKE, BUT WE'RE TRYING TO REACH OUR LINES AS SOON AS IT GETS DARK.

SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF YOU DIDN'T WIN YOURSELF A GONG, MISTER BLOOMIN' HERO -- OR A PAIR OF WINGS!

THE TRAFFIC ON ROUTE 6 HAD DIED DOWN AS THE FIVE MEN EMERGED FROM THEIR CAVE ON TO THE DARKENED HILLSIDE. AN UNEASY SILENCE FILLED THE AIR -- IT WAS THE LULL BEFORE THE NIGHTLY ASSAULT ON THE GERMAN LINE.

IS THERE ANY POINT IN LUGGING THIS WIRELESS AROUND WITH US, TUG?

YOU NEVER KNOW, JACK, IT MAY GET US OUT OF A SPOT...

THE ENGINEER CORPORAL'S PLAN WAS TO MAKE FOR CASSINO. ALREADY, ALLIED TROOPS WERE FIGHTING IN THE TOWN -- PERHAPS THEY COULD LINK UP WITH THEM.

HEY, LOOK AT THOSE TELLER MINES, TUG -- WE DON'T USUALLY SEE THEM BEFORE THEY'RE PLANTED!

YOU'RE RIGHT THERE, JACK -- AND THEY GIVE ME AN IDEA! PITY TO LET THEM GO TO WASTE HERE!



BESIDE THE PILES OF MINES WERE TWO BOXES OF DETONATORS. IN A FEW SECONDS, TUG WAS MAKING HIS WAY SWIFTLY TOWARDS A MAKE-SHIFT BRIDGE THAT SPANNED A BOMB CRATER IN THE ROAD.

TELL BURKE TO GET UNDER COVER BY THOSE TREES -- I'LL BE WITH YOU IN A FEW MINUTES!



THE TRACKWAYS OF THE BRIDGE CONSISTED OF WOODEN PLANKS LAID ON TOP OF GIRDERS -- AND BENEATH EACH TRACK, TUG PLANTED A MINE.

COULDN'T BE BETTER -- WHEN A TRUCK ROLLS ON THE PLANK, IT'LL DETONATE THE MINE -- AND BANG GOES THE BRIDGE!



IT WAS THE WORK OF A FEW SECONDS, FOR TO THE SAPPER, THE GERMAN MINE WAS AS FAMILIAR AS A BRITISH TYPE.



TUG FOUND THE OTHERS WAITING AT THE EDGE OF THE COPSE, BUT EVEN HE WAS SURPRISED BY THE FURY OF SERGEANT BURKE'S TIRADE:

YOU BLISTERING, CRAZY FOOL!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE THAT FOR?
NOW, WHEN THE JERRIES PICK US UP
WE'LL BE ACCUSED OF SABOTAGE --
THEY'LL SHOOT US! I OUGHTA
CUT YOU DOWN
WHERE YOU STAND!



TUG'S VOICE WAS COLDLY CONTEMPTUOUS AS HE STARED UNFLINCHINGLY INTO BURKE'S CONTORTED FACE. THE MAN WAS SCARED...

YOU WON'T DO THAT, BURKE --
THE JERRIES MIGHT THINK YOU
WERE FIRING AT THEM -- AND
THAT WOULD NEVER DO,
WOULD IT?

MY COIN --
IT'S GONE!



STARK PANIC WAS IN WILLIAMS' VOICE AS IT ROSE SHRILLY...



BUT WILLIAMS BABBLED ON AS IF HIS FRIEND HAD NOT SPOKEN...



IMMERSED AS THEY WERE IN THIS DRAMATIC INCIDENT, THEY HAD NOT NOTICED THE APPROACH OF A CONVOY OF GERMAN LORRIES. WILLIAMS WAS WELL OUT IN THE OPEN WHEN THE FIRST TRUCK HIT THE MINE TUG HAD LAID ...



THE FORCE OF THE BLAST HURLED WILLIAMS FROM HIS FEET... -

IN FIVE SECONDS, FRESH DISASTER HIT THE ENEMY SUPPLY TRUCKS ...



Strongpoint

THE LAST, UNDAMAGED HEAVY TRUCK DISGORGED A SHAKEN GROUP OF GERMAN SOLDIERS.



THEY HAD SIGHTED THE DAZED WILLIAMS SCRAMBLING TO HIS FEET...

THE GERMANS' GUNS CAME UP~~A RAGGED VOLLEY WAS AIMED AT THE BRIGHTLY-OUTLINED RUNNING FIGURE.



AND AT THAT RANGE SOME OF THE BULLETS WERE BOUND TO FIND THEIR MARK.

THE BRITISH SOLDIERS WATCHED IN HORROR FROM THE EDGE OF THE WOODS, AND A STRANGLED CRY CAME FROM HARRY GRAVETT.



NO, IT'S NO USE, GRAVETT~~ WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING NOW!

NEITHER MAN NOTICED THE LOOK ON BURKE'S FACE -- A LOOK IN WHICH DISBELIEF BATTLED WITH EVIL WONDER ...



BUT THEY WERE SEEN -- A MACHINE-PISTOL RATTLED HARSHLY AND BULLETS SCYTHED THROUGH THE TREES ABOVE THEM ...



Strongpoint



A MOMENT LATER, BURKE TOO WAS BLUNDERING OFF INTO THE WOODS. THEN THE STEN MAGAZINES WERE EMPTY AND TUG AND JACK TURNED AND RACED HEADLONG AFTER THE OTHERS ...



THEIR MAD FLIGHT LEFT THE GERMANS FAR BEHIND AND SUDDENLY GRAVETT CAME TO AN ABRUPT HALT.



THEY HESITATED BESIDE THE ROAD AND THEN BURKE DID A STRANGE THING! HE STEPPED BOLDLY INTO THE ROAD AND BEGAN TO WALK TOWARDS THE BOMB-WRECKED HOUSES ...



THE THUNDER OF GUNS AND THE RATTLE OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS WAS GROWING IN VOLUME. TRACERS WERE FLICKERING ACROSS THE SKY LIKE SHOOTING STARS. BUT THE ATTACK WAS A QUARTER OF A MILE AWAY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TOWN.



Strongpoint

IT WAS A NEW BURKE WHO GAVE THE ORDERS AND TUG, WHO WAS MARVELLING AT THE TRANSFORMATION, COULD NOT KNOW THAT IT WAS POSSESSION OF WILLIAMS' LUCKY COIN THAT HAD CHANGED THE COWARDLY SERGEANT.



HE LED THEM INTO THE CELLAR OF A RUINED HOUSE AND THERE THEY CROUCHED AS GERMANS CLATTERED BY...



Chapter 4 THE LUCKY COIN

THE STREET CLEARED AND TUG WILSON'S THOUGHTS TURNED AT ONCE TO THE CHANCES OF REJOINING THEIR OWN LINES.

LOOK, BURKE -- WE CAN'T BE MORE THAN A FEW HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE FRONT LINE -- HOW ABOUT IF I SEE IF THERE'S SOME WAY OF GETTING ACROSS TO OUR SIDE.

PLEASE YOURSELF...

I'LL COME WITH YOU, TUG!



EVERY SENSE ALERT, THE TWO MEN MELTED THROUGH THE CRAZY SHADOWS OF THE SHATTERED TOWN -- DETOURING, SIDE-TRACKING, BUT ALWAYS MOVING NEARER TO THE FIERCELY DISPUTED FRONT LINE.



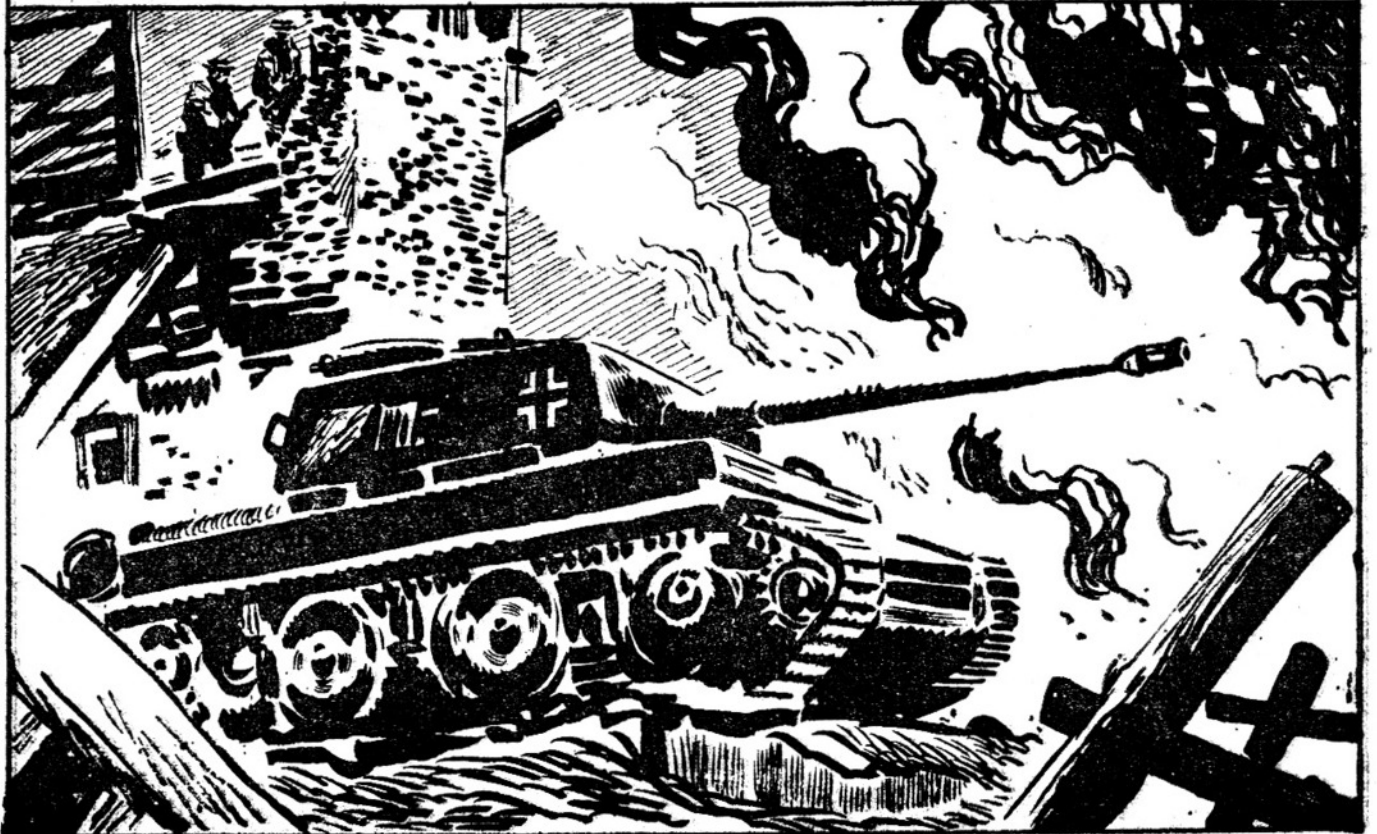
GERMAN POSITIONS WERE MORE NUMEROUS -- THE CRACKLE OF SMALL-ARMS FIRE AND THE CRUMP OF MORTARS INCESSANT ...



THE TWO ENGINEERS CLAMBERED OVER THE RUBBLE INTO THE GUTTED BELL-TOWER -- BUT THE FULL-THROATED BELLOW OF THE TANK'S EXHAUST CAME CLOSER AND CLOSER.



THE ROAR OF THE TANK'S MOTORS WAS DEAFENING AND THE TOWER SHOOK AS IF IT WOULD COLLAPSE WITH THE VIBRATION ...



THE TANK'S ENGINES SUDDENLY COUGHED INTO SILENCE AND SOUNDS OF MOVEMENTS AND VOICES FROM BELOW REACHED THE EARS OF TUG AND JACK ...



THE ALLIES WERE ADVANCING WITH RECKLESS COURAGE BUT THE ENEMY'S MORTARS WERE SEARCHING OUT WITH DEADLY PRECISION EACH LITTLE GROUP OF ASSAULT TROOPS.



DISMAY SEIZED THE TWO BRITISHERS AS THEY WATCHED ATTACK AFTER ATTACK BEING CUT TO PIECES--THEN THE CORPORAL SUDDENLY UTTERED AN INCREDULOUS EXCLAMATION.

HEY! THAT MORTAR
FIRE'S BEING DIRECTED
FROM THE TANK BELOW--
LISTEN ...



SECTOR B-SEVEN ...
INCREASE RANGE BY THREE
YARDS. OPEN BARRAGE,
TARGET BEHIND WALL.

SEE! WE'VE
GOT TO DO
SOMETHING,
JACK ~~

WHAT ARE WE
WAITING FOR--THERE'S
ONLY THREE OF THEM,
ANYWAY!



WITH EVERY SECOND'S DELAY, MORE OF THE ATTACKERS MIGHT DIE ~~ SO TUG AND JACK SPRANG INTO INSTANT ACTION.



JACK FELLED HIS MAN WITH ONE TERRIBLE SWING, BUT THE OFFICER HAD MANAGED TO AVOID TUG WILSON'S FIRST ATTACK ...



SOMEHOW THE SAPPER REACHED THE GERMAN DRIVER BEFORE HE COULD BRING UP HIS MACHINE PISTOL TO THE AIM AND THEY GRAPPLED DESPERATELY TOGETHER BESIDE THE TANK.



TWO TO ONE'S NOT FAIR -- BUT THERE'S NO RULES IN THIS GAME!

JACK--THIS MAP! IT GIVES ALL THE JERRY MORTAR POSITIONS! WE'VE GOT TO GET THESE BACK...



IT WAS VITAL -- IF ALLIED ARTILLERY KNEW THE PINPOINTS OF THE DEADLY GERMAN MORTARS, THEY COULD BE DESTROYED WITH THE SAME RUTHLESS ACCURACY AS THEY THEMSELVES HAD USED IN BREAKING EVERY INFANTRY ASSAULT ON THEIR LINES.

THE TANK RADIO -- COULD WE GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR PEOPLE WITH THAT, JACK?

NO GO, TUG -- THE JERRIES WORK ON A DIFFERENT FREQUENCY BAND TO OUR SETS.

HECK! I KNOW... THE PACK SET BACK THERE WITH BURKE! THAT'D DO IT! COME ON, JACK! NO -- WAIT... WE'D BETTER TIE THIS LOT UP FIRST.



MEANWHILE, IN THE DARK CELLAR ON THE EDGE OF CASSINO, THE LONG WAIT IN THE MIDST OF THE ENEMY WAS FRAYING THE TAUT NERVES OF HARRY GRAVETT WHO HAD BEEN BROODING OVER THE TRAGIC DEATH OF HIS FRIEND.

WHERE THE BLAZES HAVE THOSE TWO GOT TO? RUN OUT ON US, I'LL BET, THE NO-GOOD RATS!

WHY DON'T YOU KEEP STILL, SERGEANT--YOU MAKE ME NERVOUS, KEEP TOSsing THAT COIN UP AND DOWN, UP AND

GRAVETT'S VOICE, FADED TO A WHISPER-- THEN ROSE SLOWLY TO A HORRIFIED SHOUT.

... THAT COIN -- IT'S RON'S LUCKY COIN! YOU STOLE IT FROM HIM!

ARGH -- SHUT UP! THAT FOOL WILLIAMS HAD HIS SHARE OF LUCK -- NOW IT'S MY TURN!

AS GRAVETT LEVERED HIMSELF UPWARDS, HIS HAND FELL ON THE STOCK OF HIS RIFLE. ALL THE PENT-UP HATRED OF THE BULLYING SERGEANT WELLED UP INSIDE HIM AND THE BRUTISH, SNEERING FACE SHOWED THROUGH A RED MIST ...



THE RIFLE SWUNG UP, BUT BURKE MOVED FASTER ...



THE SERGEANT TURNED CONTEMPTUOUSLY AWAY...

I'LL TAKE CARE OF THIS!



GRAVETT'S FINGERS CLOSED ON THE LUCKY COIN AND WITH A CHOKED CRY HE FLUNG IT TOWARDS THE WINDOW...

Y-YOU WON'T HAVE THE COIN, I'LL MAKE SURE OF... AAAGH!



BURKE HAD REACTED INSTANTLY AND VIOLENTLY TO THE SUDDEN MOVEMENT.

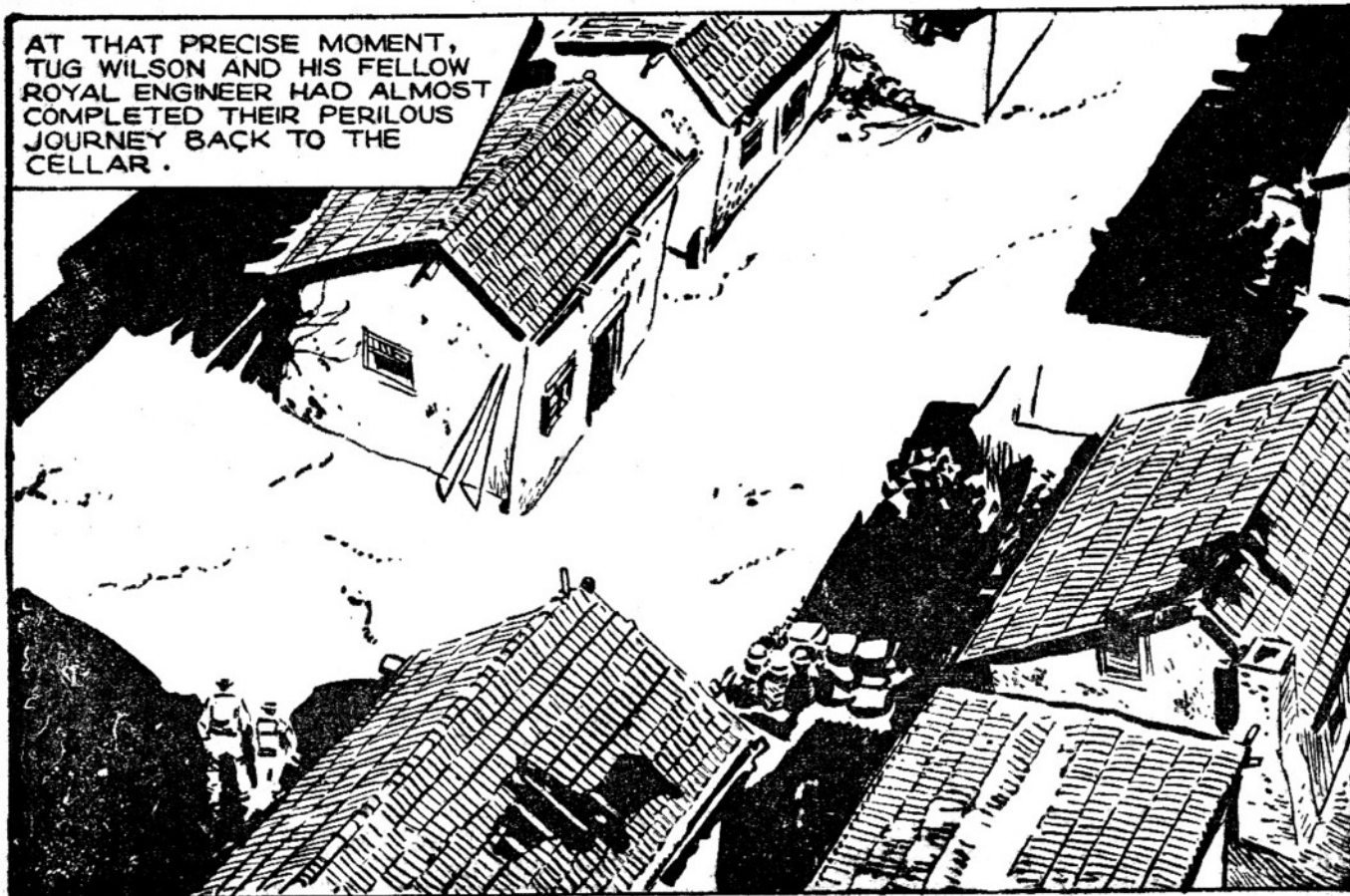
HIS EYES WIDE WITH PANIC, BURKE SPUN ROUND. THE COIN WAS ROLLING INTO THE ROADWAY ...



THERE WAS NO PITY IN BURKE'S HEART FOR THE FIGURE WRITHING ON THE FLOOR~~ HIS HALF-CRAZED THOUGHTS WERE CENTRED ON THE COIN AND NOTHING ELSE .



AT THAT PRECISE MOMENT, TUG WILSON AND HIS FELLOW ROYAL ENGINEER HAD ALMOST COMPLETED THEIR PERILOUS JOURNEY BACK TO THE CELLAR .



TWO MORE YARDS AND THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUNNERS' HARD, ALERT EYES WOULD HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY SEEN THE TWO MEN. INSTEAD, IT WAS THE STRANGE FIGURE OF BURKE THAT CAUGHT THEIR ATTENTION ...



INSTANTLY, THE SPANDAU SWUNG ROUND AND OPENED UP WITH A TERRIFYING CLATTER ...



Strongpoint

THE SERGEANT FELL AND THE FINGERS THAT HAD GROPED FRANTICALLY FOR THE LUCKY COIN WERE SUDDENLY STILLED.



KEEPING OUT OF SIGHT OF THE GERMANS UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT, TUG AND JACK CLOSED IN ON THE STRONGPOINT. THEN THEY SPRANG ...



THE GRENADE EXPLODED DEAFENINGLY ~ THERE WAS NOTHING MORE FOR JACK BARKER TO DO.

ALL QUIET, TUG! WHAT THE DEUCE WAS BURKE DOING OUT IN THE STREET, D'YOU RECKON?

I'M BLOWED IF I KNOW. GRAVETT MAY BE ABLE TO TELL US WHAT WAS GOING ON ~ NIP ACROSS TO THE CELLAR AND GET HIM AND THE RADIO. WE'LL SET OURSELVES UP HERE.



THE WIRELESS SET HAD SURVIVED THE ARDUOUS JOURNEY AND HUMMED INTO LIFE WHEN JACK SWITCHED ON. HE TUNED INTO A NETWORK THAT WAS WORKING IN PLAIN LANGUAGE...

BARKER RETURNED WITH THE WIRELESS... ALONE!

GRAVETT'S DEAD, TUG ~ LOOKS TO ME AS IF HE WAS SHOT WITH A RIFLE ~ AT CLOSE RANGE!

GOOD GRIEF! BY BURKE, YOU MEAN ~ HE MUST HAVE GONE CRAZY!



LAYCO ONE TO ALL STATIONS! LAYCO ONE TO...



HALLO, LAYCO ONE ~ THIS IS AN EMERGENCY! HALLO, LAYCO, ONE ~ THIS IS AN EMERGENCY! LISTEN CAREFULLY...

IT TOOK SEVERAL MINUTES TO CONVINCE THE WIRELESS OPERATOR THAT THE STRANGE CALL DID NOT COME FROM A GERMAN STATION. BUT AT LAST THE VITAL INFORMATION HAD BEEN EXCHANGED...



THE REACTION OF THE ALLIED COMMANDERS WAS PROMPT AND DECISIVE ...



Strongpoint

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FROM THEIR POSITION BEHIND THE ENEMY LINES, TUG WILSON AND JACK BARKER HEARD THE MOAN OF MORTAR BOMBS AND THE SWISH OF SHELLS OVERHEAD. THEN CAME THE DEVASTATING EXPLOSIONS ...



THE INFANTRY, CROUCHED IN THE RUBBLE OF CASSINO, WERE QUICK TO REALISE THAT THE GERMAN MORTARS HAD BEEN SILENCED. WITH A CONCERTED BATTLE-CRY OF DEFIANCE, THEY SURGED FORWARD ...





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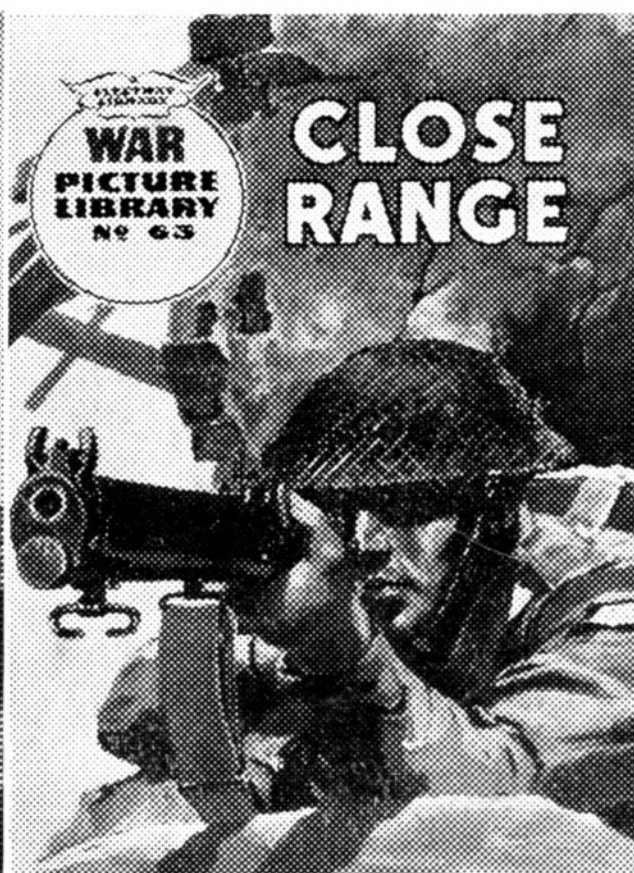
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